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Re Design Commission review of the proposed CLB Partners project at 7th St and Rio Grande St – 2nd Review Comments

Dear Mayor and Council

The Design Commission recently submitted a letter on November 14 2006 concerning the referenced project in which the Commission offered comments for your consideration. Since that time the Commission has reviewed the project further as the design has progressed and with input from the community. We appreciate the efforts of the project team to respond to the Design Commission comments to date. Based on our subsequent reviews we would like to offer the following additional comments for your consideration at this time.

We recommend approval of the project including the 400 ft height as requested by CLB Partners conditioned upon the following:

- 1 The project's level of detail (for building and streetscapes) be compatible with the level of detail used in existing historic buildings in the area
- 2 The above ground garage will be completely screened
- 3 The majority of traffic will be kept to Rio Grande St
- 4 Service access will be from the alley
- 5 The 15 foot set back of the residential tower be maintained
- 6 Proposed rental flex space at the second and third floors facing Rio Grande be retained
- 7 Curb cut and garage entrance at Rio Grande be designed to favor the pedestrian
- 8 CLB Partners' agreement to contribute \$60,000 to Shoal Creek Greenway
- 9 CLB Partners work with Capital Metro and the City of Austin to bring appropriate transit to the development
- 10 CLB Partners work with the City of Austin to address affordable housing

Sincerely,

Eleanor McKinney, Chair
 Austin Design Commission

Cc
 Laura Huffman, Assistant City Manager
 Greg Guernsey, Director, Neighborhood Planning and Zoning
 Planning Commission
 Capital Metro

01 March 2007

7TH & GRANDE PROJECT

Comments by Girard Kinney, AIA (in behalf of myself)

First, I want you all to know that I respect deeply the concern of those folks who have testified about the importance of protecting the historic district downtown. I believe that we need to do everything we can to prevent the demolition and radical reshaping of the remaining stock of historic buildings that we have in Austin in general, and in the area west of the Capitol and north of 7th in particular. I have mourned the loss of many important buildings in this sector including the great Colonel House house, the Hancock Opera building, the beautiful Victorian that once stood adjacent Central Christian Church and dozens of other great buildings. I am committed to doing everything we can to keep the remaining stock of historic buildings, and further, to take steps that insure not only their preservation, but also their function in a sustainable, economically viable downtown.

As a lifelong Austinite, I remember when our downtown was a different scale, when our skyline was dominated by our state capitol and the surrounding structures were all subordinate to it. I remember the first high rises downtown the Republic Bank and 9th & Congress and the Lumberman's condominium tower. I stood with the preservationists, fought these projects and when those fights were lost, I mourned the loss of the possibility of a downtown that could have maintained a height of 6-8 story buildings in scale with the Scarborough Building the Stephen F. Austin and the Driskill Hotel.

But as with all loss after a period of mourning it is important to look to the future. The construction of those buildings in the 1960s meant that we needed to then begin looking forward to a new day when the Austin skyline, once dominated by our magnificent state capitol building, would someday become a different skyline, one that would house a great return to the urban center and would allow one day, enough density in our core to be able to afford the transportation, the great streets, the pedestrian amenities, the open space and all the features that would become vital to a dense sustainable city.

The views of Town Lake and South Austin from the Bremond Block and other areas north of 7th street are disappearing and are soon to be lost forever. This is sad, and I mourn this loss. *But I celebrate the fact that what blocks their views can be the very construction that actually ensures that the historic fabric that is left can remain and become a vital part of a twenty first century downtown.* Just as parks, plazas and other urban open space become more and more precious as density increases so do our historic buildings and neighborhoods, including those that choose to convert from residential to commercial use, become more and more precious. Someday, rather than an isolated point tower the 7th & Rio Grande building will be part of the northern edge of a dense downtown, and will also define the southern edge of our remaining historic buildings. These new, tall, mixed use high rise buildings will accommodate a large and diverse population of downtown residences and an incredible array of support retail, offices, entertainment and services all essential to a sustainable city. If we are wise as we densify, we will have provided the transportation systems that are essential to enable density and quality of life to exist simultaneously.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of examples in the world where surrounding a treasured part of a City with large structures actually become a part of the definition of these sacred places. Central Park in New York, St. Mary's Church in San Antonio, Republic Square and Brush Square here in Austin, are but a few examples of places that have become or are becoming, better, more vital places than ever, as density has occurred around them BECAUSE OF that density.

I urge you to approve this project, including the height requested so that it can contribute to not only many other urban goals, but also because it will help us preserve the historic area to its north.

Girard Kinney, AIA